CA2ALXC-25
83C57
c.3

Constituency Service
A
Study
Examining Its Importance
To
Members of Alberta's Legislative Assembly

Marcel Dirk
Legislative Intern
June 30, 1983

Putting aside the various discussions of political philosophers and theorists over the finer aspects of democracy, it is generally agreed its essential and underlying principle is that a society's citizens elect certain individuals to represent their views and serve their interests in a legislative forum. In this fundamental regard, democracy in Alberta is no different. Seventy nine persons, Members of the Legislative Assembly, are entrusted not only to enact legislation in the interests of the entire province, but also to serve on behalf of individual constituencies. Much attention, both by members of the media and the academic community, is paid to the first of these two functions; relatively little concern, by either of these groups, is exhibited towards the second. This is unfortunate, for constituency service is an intriguing part of a Member's responsibilities. Indeed, it is perhaps the most direct way for them to work for the people they are elected to represent in Edmonton. As such, more attention needs to be paid to the importance attached to, the time spent on, and the methods used by Members in responding to the myriad of requests for information, petitions for aid, and appeals for changes in existing laws or demands for new legislation that come from their constituents. Included in this consideration, as well, should be any differences or similarities that might be noted in the approaches to constituency service taken by government cabinet ministers, government private members, and opposition members. Put simply, then, the undertaking of this paper is to compare and contrast the constituency service efforts carried out by these three groups of Members of Alberta's Legislative Assembly.

To accomplish this undertaking, a one page questionnaire with an attached memorandum explaining its purpose was delivered to all Members of the Legislative Assembly on March 10, 1983, the first day of the Twentieth Legislature. A second distribution, with another memorandum outlining the questionnaire's purpose to those Members who did not respond initially, took place two months later on May 9, 1983.[1]

Overall, sixty-six of the seventy-nine Members who make up the province's Legislative Assembly took time to respond to the questionnaire. This eighty-three percent return rate is encouraging, not only from the standpoint of the conclusions this study will be able to draw about constituency service, but also the indication it gives to the importance the Members themselves attach to this aspect of their responsibilities.

Since the questionnaires could be returned anonymously, they were coded with a small identifying mark to be able to sort the responses into the three comparative groups mentioned at the outset of this paper. Responses from each were also very good. All four opposition members, forty of forty-five private government members and twenty-two of thirty cabinet ministers, answered the questionnaire. Again, the return rates of one hundred, eighty-eight, and seventy-three percent respectively prove acceptable for statistical analysis.

The first inquiry of the questionnaire was taken directly from one of the few academic studies done on constituency service.[2] There, the question was used to measure provincial legislators' representational role focus or their "attitudinal orientation towards a particular geographic entity of representation, be it constituency, province...or some combination thereof".[3] Here it is utilized for much the same purpose, that is, to gain from Members of Alberta's Legislature some indication of where they focus their attention and

direct their efforts as representatives. Members could respond in three ways. The first was designed for those who wished to indicate a provincial outlook, concentrating not on local constituency issues, but broader policy matters affecting the entire province. The second was set up for others who feel they have a balanced perspective, dividing their attention between subjects of concern not only to the province, but also to the constituency. The third was intended for Members who hold a more narrow focus, caring most directly for the situation of their ridings and constituents.

Given these choices, a clear majority of the Members who responded to the questionnaire, chose to say that they try to balance the interests of the province and their constituencies. Forty-four Members marked this selection as compared to the two who felt they had a responsibility to the province as a whole and twenty others who felt they must account first to their ridings.[4] Much more interesting results are obtained, however, when the responses are broken down into the comparative groups of this study.

Of the three, one might expect that cabinet ministers would most likely choose the first response, responsibility to the province. This should not be that surprising. Cabinet Ministers are given particular portfolios that charge them not only with the deliberation of provincial policy in that area, but also assign to them the administration of province wide departments. With responsibilities such as these, it would be expected that ministers' attention would be directed to the province as a whole and not to their individual constituencies. It is remarkable to find, then, that only one answered in this fashion. Eleven others admitted that they try to balance provincial and constituency interests and, surprisingly, the remaining ten put responsibility to their constituencies first.

In essence, this suggests that contrary to the assumption made above

that ministers' portfolio responsibilities outweigh all other considerations, it would appear that most ministers also pay a great deal of attention to and feel a deep responsibility for their constituencies. One minister, justified his selection by stating that he finds that the interests of province and constituency should be comparable if the issue is fully understood; most others pointed to the difficulty they some times encounter in Cabinet when they must support decisions that are taken in the best interests of the province, but not necessarily for their particular constituencies.[5] It is a difficult dilemma, not perhaps to resolve since decisions can never be made that satisfy everyone, but in which to find one self. Nonetheless in terms of constituency service, it is indeed encouraging that, despite their provincial responsibilities, cabinet ministers still try to take into consideration the interests of ridings they are elected to represent in the Assembly.

Consideration of constituency responsibilities is popularly believed to be the domain of the backbench members of a legislature or parliament. These individuals, who acquire the euphemistic title of good constituency members, presumably have fewer demands on their time than their front bench colleagues and so can devote their attention to listening to the opinions and serving the needs of their constituents. Indeed, one study went so far as to conclude that "in a very real sense, Canadian party leaders have succeeded in turning their backbench colleagues into the functional equivalent of staff that apprises them of public opinion and also handles much of the constituency case work".[6] One would assume that if this were true in the Alberta situation, private members here would overwhelmingly see their primary responsibility as their constituencies, the third option on the questionnaire. The results, however, reveal that only nine of the forty of the forty-five private members who responded chose the expected answer. A substantial portion, thirty in number, see the need to

balance constituency and provincial interests and one member even decided his primary responsibility was to the province as a whole.

It is fascinating to speculate why such a high percentage of private members see such a representational role for themselves. Part of the explanation no doubt lies in a flaw in the original assumption that backbenchers have few demands on their time and hence occupy themselves wholly with constituency work. A view like this obviously ignores a backbencher's other responsibilities. In Alberta, government private members are expected to serve on several of the eight legislative and fourteen caucus standing and special committees.[7] Since these bodies are framed to deal with matters affecting the entire province, the Members that serve on them must extend their focus beyond the boundaries of their own constituencies and consider the impact of legislation and government policy on all of Alberta.

Obviously, though, Alberta private members are not alone in participating on committees; other backbenchers have a place in similar infrastructures in their legislatures and parties. It would seem what sets Alberta apart from the rest is the importance attached to these committees, particularly in caucus. Much has been made of Peter Lougheed's concept of team government.[8] By all reports, caucus is actively involved in the policy making process.[9] Decisions are reached by concensus, after each participant, private member and cabinet minister alike, has had the opportunity to speak out and cast their vote on the proposals brought before caucus by the various committees. Surely, participation by Alberta private members in a process that is usually reserved for the executive council in other jurisdictions convinces them that they must be cognizant of a wide scope of interests. Indeed, one private member expressed sentiments exactly like those of his cabinet colleagues when he remarked that he sometimes supports caucus decisions, even though they may have a detrimental effect on his constituency, because they are

good for the province as a whole.[10] It would appear on the basis of this sort of response that Progressive Conservative government private members have taken their party's most recent election campaign slogan to heart and do indeed believe that they have representational responsibilities not just for their own constituencies, but "for Alberta".

In a slightly different fashion the small contingent of opposition members in Alberta also find that they must also balance provincial and constituency interests. On the one hand, although they are elected to represent one constituency, they also find they are expected to speak for their supporters in the other seventy-eight by taking positions on nearly every issue that confronts the province. In this regard, opposition members must clearly put provincial interests ahead of responsibility to their individual ridings. On the other hand, opposition members must make certain they focus especially close attention on their constituencies, for they cannot afford to ignore the people who elect them to the Assembly. In the last election, the present four opposition members were selected by relatively narrow majorities by the voters they now represent.[11] Since researchers have found that constituents and politicians alike feel that constituency service plays a significant part in the likelihood of re-election and a decisive role in close campaigns,[12] opposition members in Alberta are careful to make special efforts to keep their electors satisfied. In the case of the Independents, both have established reputations as men who are extremely diligent in their duties to their constituents. Likewise, the two members of the New Democratic Party feel they must allot regular periods of time to their constituencies for tours and cultivate contacts with community organizations to maintain their base of support.[13]

The necessity, then, for opposition members to make certain that they represent both constituency and province would lead one to believe that they

would most likely choose the second alternative on the questionnaire. This is indeed the case with only one opposition member indicating that his primary responsibility lies to his constituency and the other three selecting the response which shows an attempt to balance interests.

It seems almost unnecessary to state that politicians have extremely busy schedules. Attending legislative sessions, serving on various committees and managing the deluge of requests from their constituents make incredible demands on their time. Members of Alberta's Legislative Assembly are no different in this regard. Three reports over the past ten years have traced a history of an increasing workload and responsibility placed upon elected officials.[14] Each noted the trend towards longer sessions of the Assembly, the increasing number of standing committees and special task forces struck by both the Legislature and government, and finally, the extensive time necessary for constituency tasks. Obviously, Members must carefully manage their schedules if they hope to fulfill all these commitments. It is the division of this time that concerns the next section of this paper. Since it is relatively easy to ascertain the amount of time spent in the Assembly and committee meetings simply by counting the days each sits, the survey's second question directly asked Members to estimate the amount of time they spent on constituency problems.[15]

In total, when the responses from all Members are considered together, they are distributed normally across the available choices. None chose the no time option, seventeen felt they work a quarter of the time on constituency matters, twenty-four indicated that half their time is spent on constituency work, seventeen others revealed that they spend up to three quarters of their time on constituency affairs, and seven more devote nearly all their time to constituency related business. More fascinatingly skewed, though not any more unexpected results, are revealed when the percentages of time apportioned to

constituency work by cabinet ministers, government private members, and opposition members are considered separately.

For cabinet ministers, it does not seem possible that they could hope to apportion nearly the amounts of time to constituency concerns as the other two groups. The day to day administrative worries and the longer term policy goals of their departments should undoubtedly occupy the majority of their time. Nonetheless, given the dedication to their constituencies that was evident in their responses to the first question, it would be expected they would try to devote at least a small part of their schedule to constituency work. It would appear that this is exactly the situation. One cabinet minister claims to devote over half his time and eight others schedule up to that figure, but the remaining thirteen say they spend less than a quarter of their time on constituency matters.

For government private members, the popular assumption that they, of all members, should be able to devote the most time to serving their constituents seems borne out on this occasion by their responses to this question. Seven individuals report that they spend more than three quarters of their time on constituency concerns. Fifteen others spend up to this amount of time in a similar manner and fourteen more spend at least half of their time engaged in satisfying their constituents. Only three private members spend less than half their time in this activity.

For opposition members, the quandary outlined earlier of having to spend time on provincial interests while still playing close attention to individual constituencies would suggest that they would have to devote at least half their time to each to maintain the necessary balance. Not surprisingly, this is indeed the case. Two opposition members chose the response which indicates this percentage of time exactly, and another the next higher gradation.

Only one of the four devotes less than half his time to constituency affairs.

Clearly, then, the responses by cabinet ministers, private members, and opposition members, as outlined above, provide a quantitative analysis of the amount of time these three respective groups apportion to constituency service. It would be interesting, but nearly impossible to supplement this data with a breakdown of the types of service Members perform for their constituents. The impossibility comes about primarily, as one Member so adroitly pointed out, on account of the great diversity in problems and needs among the seventy-nine electoral divisions that differ so markedly in population, size, and outlook.[16] A complex methodology would have to be devised to take into account these variables that in the end would render any sort of comparison or categorization meaningless. Perhaps, then, the attempt to generally classify the percentage of time Members devote to constituency problems is the best that can be done.

Publicly funded constituency offices are a relatively recent development in Alberta. It was only in 1979 when amendments were first made to the Legislative Assembly Act that Members were provided with funds for the rental and operation of constituency offices. According to the terms outlined then, Members of the Legislative Assembly were each entitled to allowances of $5000 to acquire office space and $5000 to hire secretarial staff.[17] Subsequent amendments in 1980 allowed the Speaker, on the recommendation of the Members' Services Committee, to increase the aggregate amount of $10,000 if the cost of providing these services appreciated substantially at any time.[18] As a result, an allowance of $13,750 is now administered for constituency office purposes by the Office of the Clerk.[19]

Presently, fifty-four Members take advantage of these funds and operate constituency offices in their ridings.[20] A majority of these offices function, with part time staff, out of city office buildings or store front

locations on a town's main street. Most of the guidelines prepared by the Office of the Clerk regarding agreements, supplies, and services for the operation of these permanent offices apply quite neatly. Luckily, the staff there, as well as the Legislative Assembly Act, are sufficiently flexible to accommodate those Members who find the traditional constituency office not particularly well suited for their situation.

For example, it is convenient for some urban Members that there is mention in one section of the Act that constituency offices do not have to be located within the boundaries of their electoral divisions.[21] This allows contiguous constituencies to combine operations. In Calgary, on account of this section, two Members from adjoining ridings share space in a common constituency office. Likewise, in the same city, a Member of the Legislative Assembly and a Member of Parliament, whose ridings overlap, also have a common office for their constituents.[22] Presumably, these cooperative efforts help these representatives combine their abilities and staff to provide better, full time service for their constituents.

The definition of rental office space under the Act is also helpful since it includes both fixed locations or structures that may be moved from place to place.[23] This is an important distinction, for it allows Members to set up temporary constituency offices if they do not feel the necessity or desirability of maintaining a permanent one. This seems particularly true for Edmonton Members whose Legislative offices are close enough to be accessible by constituents to make a separate constituency office an unnecessary duplication. Nonetheless, these Members still might wish to give their constituents the opportunity to talk in a more informal setting. A number of innovative methods have been designed to accomplish this end. Two Members, for instance, have set up booths at shopping centres in their ridings and invited constituents to

drop by and speak to them there.[24] Another parked a motorhome at a prominent intersection in his riding and invited his constituents to discuss issues of concern with him there.[25] Finally, a number of Members have taken to the idea of holding informal coffee parties or town hall meetings at locations within their constituencies.[26] There, for one evening, they can answer constituents questions on various matters and listen to their opinions on issues of the day. Matters arising at any of these temporary offices that need to be followed through upon can be handled in the normal manner back at the Legislature.

Rural Members have also taken advantage of these interpretive sections of the Legislative Assembly Act, but in a somewhat different way. In order to increase their accessibility, some of them like to establish not one central office, but a number of sub-offices throughout their constituencies. Six Members, at present, employ this method to make certain that the entire area of their constituencies are covered, usually by strategically placing one office at each end of the riding. One Member, however, has fourteen contact points, as he likes to characterize them, spread throughout his constituency, to ensure his constituents are never that far away that it is a long drive to get in touch with his staff for help.[27] As well, some Members in rural constituencies do not see the need for separate constituency offices since people usually contact them at home with their problems and concerns. They, therefore, find it more convenient to maintain a place in their homes and list their telephone numbers in local directories. Although this often means spouses are seconded as staff to deal with requests and the Member is virtually on continual call, it appears these adjunct home offices function admirably in rural ridings where people seem to expect and develop close personal association with their representatives.

Given the wide variations in the way Members can use their constituency offices, no question could be designed to adequately take into account all the functions. Rather than classifying Members' uses of constituency offices, the third question on the survey measures Members general perceptions towards their offices, that is to say, what type of role they see for themselves and their offices. Chosing the first response indicated that the Members perceived a passive role for themselves in that they expect the constituents to initiate contact by coming into the office. Selecting the second response meant the Members saw an active part for themselves, for in this case it is the Members who use their offices to reach out and contact their constituents. Finally, opting for the third response revealed those Members who felt they served their constituents better without an office.

The results of this part of the questionnaire show a strong preference on behalf of all Members to perceive an active role for their offices. In each group, a majority marked this response as best suiting their expectations for the operation of their offices with fifteen cabinet ministers, twenty-four private members, and three opposition members combining for a total of forty-two. This compares to the twenty-two members; broken down into, one opposition member, fourteen private members, and seven cabinet ministers who indicated a passive role for themselves and their offices. Unfortunately, the figures for these two categories are inflated somewhat because six cabinet ministers and five private members checked both responses. Nevertheless, even factioning out these dual responses, the general trend towards seeing an active role is still maintained. This is encouraging, for it means that Members are committing themselves to go to the people rather than expecting the opposite.

Presumably, a situation like this encourages people to bring their concerns to their Members. One observer even goes so far to suggest that

"if people know the Member can be reached and welcomes their problems then they will go to him; if they know that the Member is inaccessible they may not even try to contact him".[28] This suggestion that constituent demands will increase in direct proportion to the availability and activity of the Member is directly supported by the comments of a number of Members. They reveal that the establishment of constituency offices has actually created more work for them, since constituents do not hesitate to bring all types of requests for assistance to them.[29]

Among these requests, Members note some that, while clearly a government responsibility, ask them, for example, to make changes to the abortion laws or to help clear a clogged sewer line. Unfortunately, these duties do not really come within their jurisdiction. As a result, one of the developments Members concede is that a substantial portion of their constituency work has what has been characterized as a "traffic cop orientation".[30] As representatives of the middle level government in this country, Members re-route requests, such as the ones mentioned above, either up to federal Members of Parliament or down to municipal councillors.

Besides acting as jurisdictional traffic cops, Members have also become ombudsmen for their constituents. It has been noted in one source that:

> People expect their Members to smooth out the operation of the laws they have passed. Each person is a special case. He does not understand the laws, the regulations, how they came into being or how they are applied. But he expects his Member to and he expects a favourable decision.[31]

A number of Members commented, after hearing this statement, that though their constituents often come to them with more reasonable expectations, they nonetheless find themselves sorting through constituent's difficulties with government

departments and bureaucratic agencies and interceding on their behalf if the red tape becomes too thick to unravel.

The second query on the questionnaire sought to establish the total amount of time spent on constituency work; the fourth seeks an even more quantitative measure, the actual amount of time devoted exclusively to work in constituency offices.

The responses to the choices show that Members most often spend one day a week in their constituency offices, though the three cabinet ministers, the twenty private members, and the two opposition members who answered in this fashion reveal an interesting distribution, It lends more support to the notion that private members are the most likely to be able to regularily devote time to constituency affairs. One might still want to ponder, however, whether this time is set aside by these Members because they actually have it or whether they must make the room on their schedules to meet the expectations of their constituents. Judging from comments made by some Members that the day they set aside has to be a Saturday, one is lead to believe that the latter course is the one that more accurately reflects their situation.

Similarily, it is worthwhile noting that only four cabinet ministers and two private members spend little or no time in their constituency offices. The fact that they employ methods other than permanent offices accounts for some of the responses, but one might wonder if they can afford to spend less time in their constituency offices because of their solid electoral majorities. As one might observe, no opposition members chose these responses nor one imagines could they, given their slim margins of victory. Undoubtedly, the profile of being in the constituency more often and working out of an office there lends an important presence to their image that helps at election time.

The most interesting finding of this question is one that, though it fails to establish conclusively an exact period of days spent by Members in their constituency offices, does reveal an intriguing trend in the division of time between legislative activities and constituency work. This finding develops out of the responses to the last choice of question four, the other category. It was chosen by a number of Members - thirteen cabinet ministers, sixteen private members, and two opposition members, to be exact - often not because the other categories were not applicable, but because they wished to note the differences in the time they apportioned to their constituency office when the Assembly was in session and when it was not sitting. Twenty-three of the thirty-one who chose this response indicated that when they are in Edmonton, it is difficult for them to make regular appearances at their constituency offices. During this time, their schedule varies with most of them squeezing in appointments in the evenings or on weekends when they return to the constituency. Generally, when the session ends, they start spending considerably more time in their offices, a few even going so far to say that they try to spend the majority of their time there.[32] The best way to describe it would be perhaps as an ebb and flow between legislative work and constituency service. Undeniably, both activities take place concurrently, but there would appear to be peaks when efforts are concentrated in one or the other area.

Mention was made earlier of the enormous constituency workload carried by Members of the Legislature. This belief is further confirmed by the responses to the survey's fifth question which was designed to measure the range of Members' reliance on staff help in handling their constituency work. Of the three choices, two cabinet ministers, four private members, and one opposition member chose the first option of delegating their constituency work completely to staff and only two private members selected the last choice

of dealing with constituency work entirely on their own. This means, clear majorities of Members in each of the three groups, then, rely on some help from their staff with twenty cabinet ministers, thirty-three private members, and three opposition members responding in this fashion. Comments accompanied this choice as well, with Members altering the sentence to reveal that they relied on their staff for considerable help and some even strongly intimated the need for additional secretarial staff and research assistants.

It would seem appropriate, in light of these comments, to outline the resources Members have to draw upon for their constituency work. The provisions, of course, for constituency office staff have already been alluded to in a preceding section. Each Member who operates a constituency office finds the person they employ there usually handles the routine requests themselves and passes the more difficult concerns on to the Members themselves. As well, since most of these positions are part time, a good many requests also arrive at Members Legislature offices. Here, each of the three groups has different arrangements to handle this influx of telephone calls and mail.

In their offices, ministers rely on the services of a personal staff, most often composed of two or three secretaries and an executive assistant. Some, on account of the nature of their portfolio, also have an administrative or special assistant added to this complement. In speaking to some members of these staffs, it appears that their ministers rely quite heavily on them to deal with constituents and their concerns. Executive assistants and secretaries alike will field calls from the public and draft replies to letters on behalf of their ministers, apprising them of all, but the most routine cases. In this way, the time ministers do devote to constituency work can be directed towards the more difficult cases without any fear that simpler requests might be ignored, since they have been handled by their staffs.

In much the same way, the flow of constituency work for the other two groups of Members is facilitated by assistance from their staffs. Private members, usually in groups of three, share the services of a secretary. Depending, of course, upon the personalities of their Members, the staff find they perform much more than the normal duties of stenographers and file clerks. They, too, must routinely field calls from constituents that seek information on government programs or answer letters that request assistance with various problems. They, necessarily, become quite adept in these roles for their Members. Private members can also pass their more complicated constituency concerns on to the Government Research Branch. Eight researchers, each assigned to specific Members, take on special investigatory assignments to provide this information for Members. Similarily, four Legislative Interns, who serve the entire government caucus, are available and are utilized to a certain extent by private members for help with constituency work.

More extensive use is made of the four Interns distributed to the opposition members. This seems to be so, because they effectively double the size of the research staffs of the Independent and New Democratic Party offices and so enlarge their capability of handling the ever present constituency case load that exists in both offices. Essentially, since these staffs of three and five persons respectively, also do much of the work in preparing for the daily demands of session, the dual obligations of the opposition members to both province and constituency could only be met with the considerable help of these staffs.

With the time and energy that needs to be expended on constituency work by Members and their staffs, the obvious question that remains is whether the effort is a rewarding one. A study comes to the conclusion that:

> constituency service may be a gratifying activity for legislators...they are less likely to be frustrated in this area and more likely to receive both thanks and a sense of accomplishment from the solution of a constituent's problem.[33]

These sentiments evidently seem to summarize the situation of Alberta Members as well. Many spoke of the sense of satisfaction they received from solving problems for their constituents and proudly recalled letters of appreciation and pointed out mementoes of thanks that came from people they had helped. In a small way, they remarked these gestures made them feel the time and effort dedicated to constituency service was rewarding.

Yet, there seems to be more to Members' desire to serve their constituents than simply this sort of gratification. For most, a real sense of pride seems to exist that they are the chosen representatives from their constituencies. Whether it is in the speeches made in the Assembly or the introduction of constituents to the traditional desk thumping welcome of the Assembly, all Members like the chance to rise in their place and acknowledge the trust the area and its inhabitants have placed in them.[34]

While obviously proud of this trust, Members are also mindful that to live up to it, they are required to dedicate attention to the expectations and needs of their constituents. Constituency service is quite simply then a necessary obligation if democratically elected representatives are to serve the interests of their electors.

It is on account of this feeling, then, that constituency service is such an important part of the democratic process and deserving of more attention from the academic community and the media. This study was motivated in part because of their lack of concern. Its findings, based upon the replies to a questionnaire sent to Members of Alberta's Legislative Assembly confirm a

dedication to constituency service. It is true in comparing and contrasting the responses of cabinet ministers, government private members, and opposition members, that differing trends emerge regarding the views of each groups towards the importance attached to, the time spent on, and the methods used in dealing with the demands of constituents. Nonetheless, taken as a whole, these differences do not in any way diminish the conclusion that Members of Alberta's Legislative Assembly take the commitment to represent and serve their constituencies very seriously.

NOTES

1. Copies of these two memoranda and the questionnaire are attached as an appendix to this study.

2. Harold D. Clarke, Richard G. Price and Robert Krause, "Constituency Service among Canadian Provincial Legislators: Basic Findings and a Test of Three Hypotheses: in Canadian Journal of Political Science (December, 1975), p.527. A great debt is owed to the authors of this work for providing me with not only this question but also the general framework for my study. It should not in any way, however, be viewed as a replication of their methods or analysis.

3. Ibid, p.522.

4. At the end of this paper, four tables - All Members, Government Cabinet Minister, Government Private Members, and Opposition Members - are attached which detail graphically, by way of histograms, the distribution of the response to this and the other four questions. Readers are encouraged to use these tables so that they can see visually the list of results that are described here and at other points throughout the paper.

5. The first comment was noted by the minister on his questionnaire; the other view was attached to their questionnaires by a separate sheet explaining their reasoning for this choice and was also expressed by two cabinet ministers whom I interviewed on March 21 and April 15, 1983 respectively.

6. Allan Komberg and William Mishler, Influences in Parliament: Canada (Durham: Duke University Press, 1976), p.

7. The number of Legislative committees was found by consulting a list printed periodically in Alberta Hansard; the number of government committees from a memorandum supplied by the Government Whip's office.

8. For example, see Allan Hustak, Peter Lougheed (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1979); Peter Puxley, "The Psychological Appeals of Separatism" in Western Separatism The Myths, Realities, and Dangers, Larry Pratt and Garth Stevenson editors. (Edmonton: Hurtig Publishers, 1981); Christina Newman, "The New Power in the New West" in Saturday Night (September 1976), 17-25; and John Richards and Larry Pratt, Prairie Capitalism (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1979) who all touch on this concept.

9. Comments have been expressed in this matter on a number of occasions by government members and staff. It, and the process which is described immediately after in this study are supported by an investigation by Peter McCormick, "Politics After the Landslide" in Parliamentary Government (Volume 4, Number 1, 1983), 8-10.

10. Interview conducted with a private member on March 15, 1983.

11. According to The Report of The Chief Electoral Officer on The 1982 General Election Held Tuesday, November 2, 1982, the margins of victory for the opposition members were 878, 65, 1030, and 183 votes, by no means massive landslides given that 15,232; 10,567; 6,352; and 7,834 votes were cast in each respective electoral division.

12. R.J. Drummond and F.J. Fletcher, "Mass Media Use and Perceptions of Legislators Among Ontario Voters" (Vancouver: Simon Fraser University Legislative Studies Conference, 1979), p. 1 and the same authors' "Political Communication and Orientation to Legislators among Ontario Voters" in Parliament, Policy, and Representation, Harold D. Clarke, et.al., editors. (Toronto:Methuen, 1980), p.104

13. Discussions with spokesmen from both these offices support these claims.

14. Report(s) of the Committee which considered Allowances and Salaries paid to Members of the Legislative Assembly, the Deputy Speaker, the Speaker, Leader of the Official Opposition, Members of Executive Council and the Premier (September, 1972, Chairman: Justice O'Byrne; October, 1975, Chairman: Justice Prowse; September, 1979, Chairman: Justice Miller)

15. This question, too, was borrowed directly from the Clarke, Price and Krause study mentioned previously. As a number of Members pointed out, the use of the word "problems" in the question is perhaps inappropriate since it gives a somewhat negative connotation to the work they do and does not also include the other requests their constituents make of them.

16. This difficulty was pointed out in a memorandum attached to a questionnaire completed by a private member.

17. Statutes of Alberta 1979 chapter 48 section 4 p.234.

18. Statutes of Alberta 1980 chapter 79 section 2 p.637.

19. This figure is taken from a memorandum sent to all Members of the Legislative Assembly by the Director of Administration. It also outlines the arrangements made by the Office of the Clerk to provide and pay for other items and services provided to constituency offices.

20. This figure is likely to increase as a number of constituency offices are in the process of being established by Members who previously did not have them.

21. Revised Statutes of Alberta, 1980 chapter L-10 section 54(6)(a).

22. As reported in Gordon Jaremko, "Constituency office program untranished by controversy" in The Calgary Herald (January 31, 1983), B5

23. Revised Statutes of Alberta, 1980 chapter L-10 section 54(1).

24. As advertised in the Edmonton Journal (February 20, 1983), A3 and (June 22, 1983), A2.

25. As advertised in the Edmonton Journal (March 16, 1983), A10.

26. Town hall meetings were advertised in the Edmonton Journal (April 11, 1983), B2 and (April 27, 1983) A2. Notices for informal coffee parties appeared in the same paper on (February 27, 1983) B3 and (May 1, 25, and June 2, 1983) B2, B4, and B3, respectively.

27. This member provided this information and characterization on the questionnaire he returned to me.

28. Jeremy Ackerman, What Have You Done For Me Lately? (A Politician Explains) (Windsor: Lancelot Press, 1977) p.46.

29, Alistair Fraser, "Legislators and their Staffs" in Parliament, Policy, and Representation. Harold D. Clarke, et.al., editors. (Toronto Methuen, 1980) p.232-33 discussed the self-generating workload of constituency offices that Alberta Members are alluding to here.

30. This characterization was provided during an interview with a cabinet minister on May 10, 1983 and supported by the comments of a number of private and opposition members and staff persons at various other times.

31. Gordon Aiken, The Backbencher (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1974) pp.86-87. Drummond and Fletcher, Fraser, and J.A. Lovink, "Who Wants Parliamentary Reform?" in Queen's Quarterly (Winter, 1972) p.510, also allude to an "ombudsman" function that is inherent in this quote.

32. The comments come by way of remarks that Members wrote on their questionnaires and were mentioned specifically by all of the members I interviewed for this paper.

33. Drummond and Fletcher, Mass Media Use and Perceptions of Legislators Among Ontario Voters, p.2.

34. The best example of this are the heartfelt speeches made by Members, cabinet ministers, private members, and opposition members alike, in reply to the Throne Speech. It is traditional that Members mention their constituencies at this time and most make careful efforts to do so, indicating in a definitive, earnest way their feelings about their constituencies.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Ackerman, Jeremy, What Have You Done For Me Lately? (A Politician Explains); (Windsor: Lancelot Press, 1977)

Aiken, Gordon; The Backbencher (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1974)

Clarke, Harold D. and Richard G. Price, "Learning to be a Legislator: The Case of Provincial MLAs" in Parliament, Policy and Representation; Harold D. Clarke, Colin Campbell, F.Q. Quo, and Arthur Goddard, editors (Toronto: Methuen, 1980)

Clarke, Harold D., Richard G. Price, and Robert Krause, "Constituency Service among Canadian Provincial Legislators: Basic Findings and a Test of Three Hypotheses" in Canadian Journal of Political Science (December, 1975), 520-542

Drummond, R.J. and F.J. Fletcher, "Mass Media Use and Perceptions of Legislators Among Ontario Voters" (Vancouver: Simon Fraser University Legislative Studies Conference, 1979)

Drummond, Robert J. and Frederick J. Fletcher, "Political Communication and Orientation to Legislators among Ontario Voters" in Parliament, Policy and Representation, Harold D. Clarke et.al., editors (Toronto: Methuen, 1980)

Fraser, Alistair, "Legislators and their Staffs" in Parliament, Policy and Representation, Harold D. Clarke, et.al., editors (Toronto: Methuen, 1980)

Jaremko, Gordon, "Constituency Office Program Untarnished by Controversy" in The Calgary Herald (January 31, 1983) B5.

Kornberg,Allan and William Mishler, Influences in Parliament: Canada (Durham: Duke University Press, 1976)

Lovink, J.A.A., "Who Wants Parliamentary Reform? in Queen's Quarterly (Winter 1972) 505-513

Report(s) of the Committee which considered Allowances and Salaries paid to Members of the Legislative Assembly, the Deputy Speaker, the Speaker, Leader of the Official Opposition, Members of Executive Council and the Premier (September 1972, Chairman: Justice O'Byrne; October 1975, Chairman: Justice Prowse; September 1979, Chairman: Justice Miller)

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
ALBERTA

MEMORANDUM

FROM: Marcel M.C. Dirk
Legislative Intern
6th Floor
Old Agriculture Building

TO:

OUR FILE No.:
YOUR FILE No.:

TELEPHONE No.: 422-0042

DATE: March 10,1983

One of the components of the Alberta Legislative Internship Program requires that I, as an Intern, research and write an academic paper on an aspect of Alberta's Legislature. I would like to explore the topic of constituency service, a vitally important aspect of the legislative process, yet one which has received little attention previously. My study will investigate the efforts employed by a Member of the Legislative Assembly in handling the myriad of requests and questions posed by their constituents. You will find attached to this memo a series of questions on various aspects of constituency service. I would be pleased if you would complete this short questionnaire and return it to the address above so that it might be possible for me to compare your answers with those of your colleagues and come to some conclusions in my study. Also, if you are interested, I would be most happy to meet with you and discuss your views on constituency service. I can be reached at the telephone number above to set up a time convenient for you. Finally, my research will be completed by the end of June. If you are interested in my findings, please let me know and I will forward a copy of my paper to you. Thank you for your time in completing the questionnaire and your consideration in this matter; it is most appreciated.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
ALBERTA

MEMORANDUM

FROM:
Marcel Dirk
Legislative Intern
Sixth Floor
Legislature Annex

TO:

OUR FILE No.:

YOUR FILE No.:

TELEPHONE No.:
422-0042

DATE:
May 9, 1983

In March, I circulated a questionnaire on constituency service to all Members of the Legislative Assembly for a research paper I am required to write as part of the Legislative Internship Program. The initial response to the questionnaire was most encouraging with sixty Members taking the time to answer it. Still, it would be best if I has a set of responses from all of Alberta's elected representatives upon which I could base my research. Therefore, as one of the persons who has yet to respond to the questionnaire, if you could complete the attached copy, it would be most helpful for my project. Furthermore, if it is possible, I would be most happy to meet with you and discuss your views on constituency service. I can be reached at the telephone number above to set up a time convenient for you. Finally, my research will be completed by the end of June. If you are interested in my findings, please let me know and I will forward a copy of my paper to you.

1. Some Members of the Legislative Assembly feel that their primary responsibility as a representative is to their constituency first and then to the province as a whole. Others feel differently. How do you feel about this matter?

___ My primary responsibility is to the province as a whole.

___ I try to balance the interests of the province and the interests of the constituency.

___ My primary responsibility is to my constituency.

2. On average, approximately how much of your working time as a Member of the Legislative Assembly is spent on constituency problems?

___ No time spent working on constituency problems.

___ 1-25 percent of time spent working on constituency problems.

___ 26-50 percent of time spent working on constituency problems.

___ 51-75 percent of time spent working on constituency problems.

___ 76-100 percent of time spent working on constituency problems.

3. Often Members of the Legislative Assembly see their constituency offices as a place where their constituents can drop in to discuss their concerns. Others see a different purpose for their offices. How do you see your office?

___ I see my office as a place where my constituents can drop in to discuss their concerns with me.

___ I see my office as a base of operations from which I can maintain contact with my constituency and act in its interests.

___ I see little use for a constituency office as I get a better indicator of my constituents' needs from periodic personal visits.

4. On average, how much time do you spend in your constituency office?

___ No time spent in constituency office.

___ One day a week.

___ One day a month.

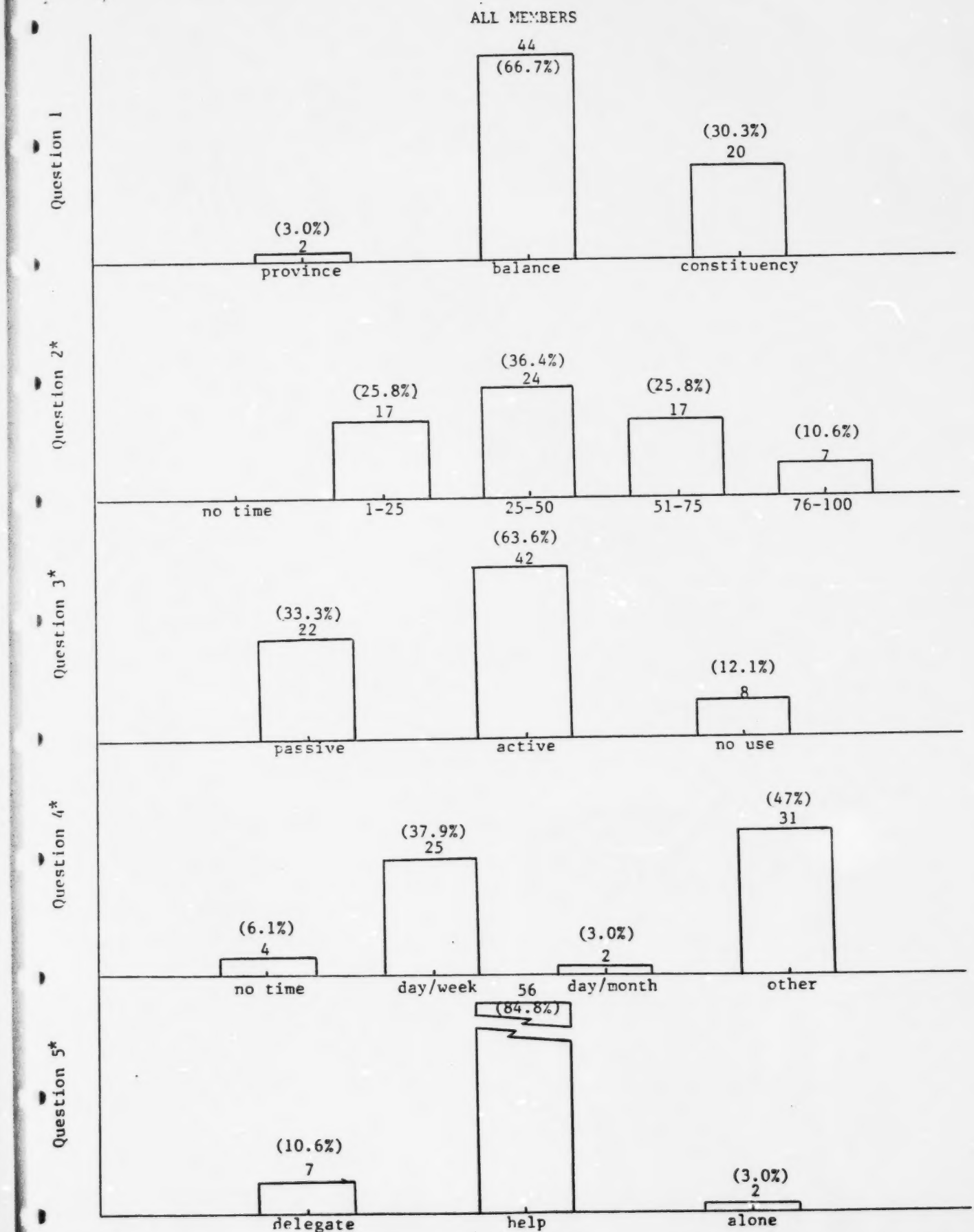
___ Other_____

5. Some Members of the Legislative Assembly try to handle their constituency work alone, while others rely on the services of a staff. What is your situation?

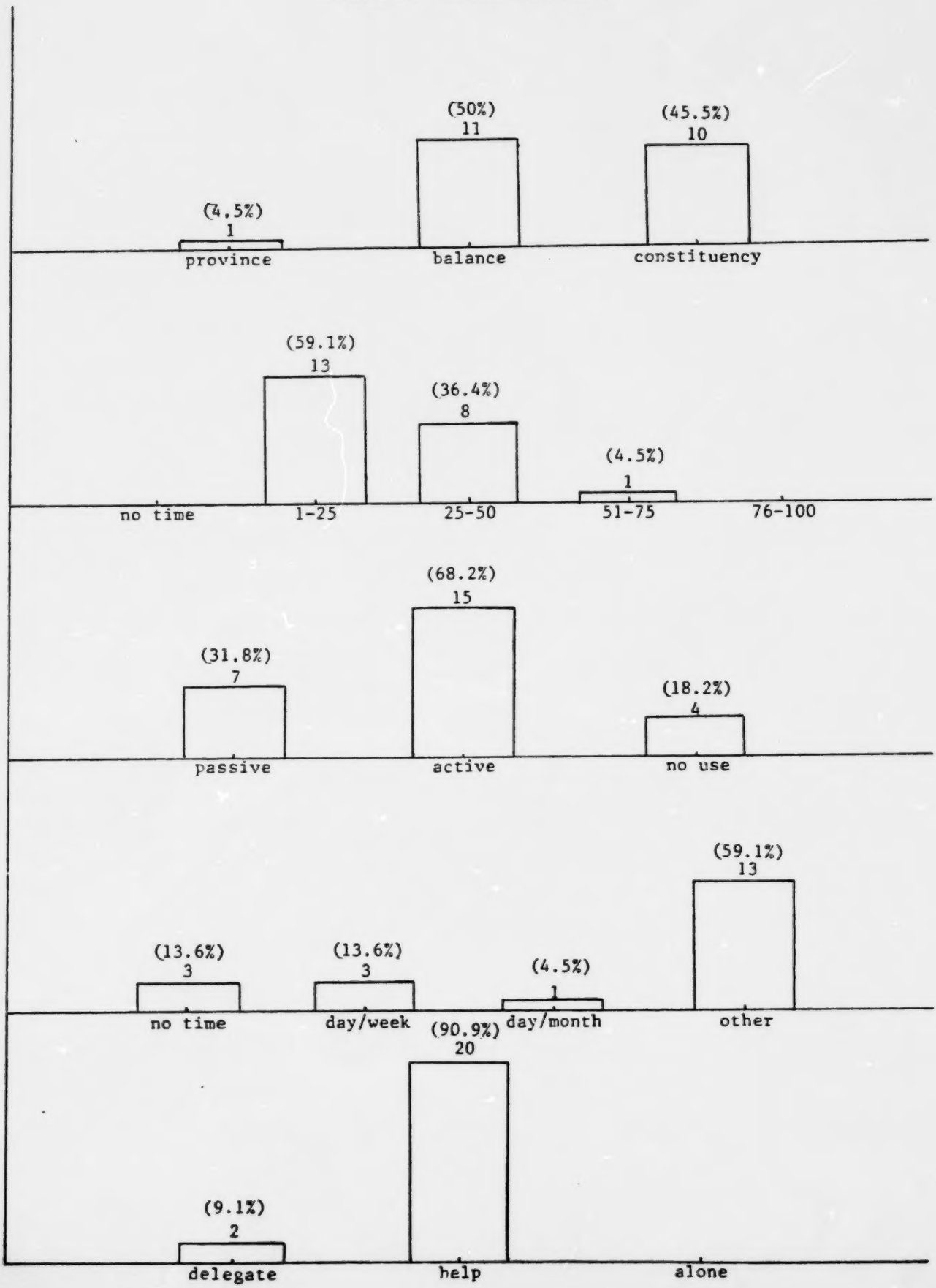
___ I find I must delegate my constituency work to my staff.

___ I find that I am able to handle my constituency work with some help from my staff.

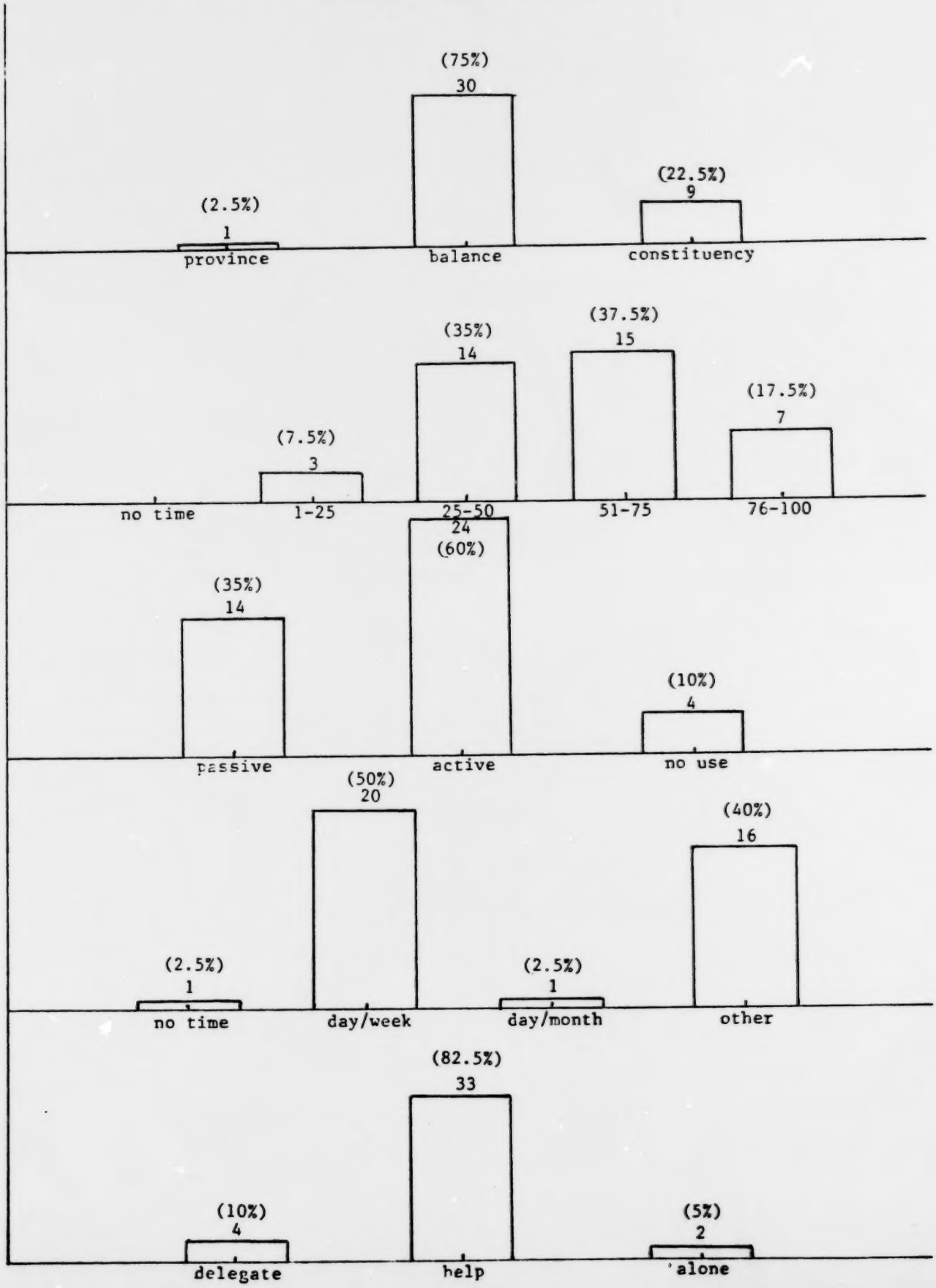
___ I find I am able to deal with my constituency work on my own.


ALL MEMBERS
Question 1
44
(66.7%)
(30.3%)
20
(3.0%)
2
province
balance
constituency
Question 2*
(36.4%)
24
(25.8%)
17
(25.8%)
17
(10.6%)
7
no time
1-25
25-50
51-75
76-100
Question 3*
(63.6%)
42
(33.3%)
22
(12.1%)
8
passive
active
no use
Question 4*
(47%)
31
(37.9%)
25
(6.1%)
4
(3.0%)
2
no time
day/week
day/month
other
Question 5*
56
(84.8%)
(10.6%)
7
(3.0%)
2
delegate
help
alone

GOVERNMENT CABINET MINISTERS

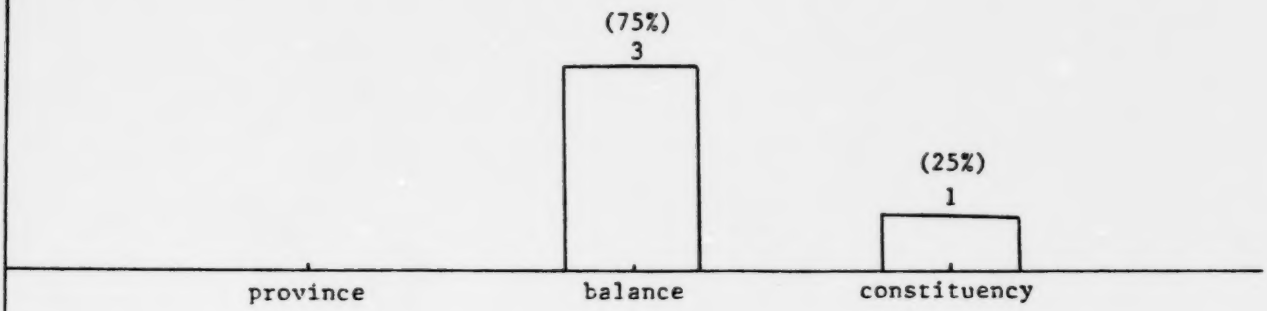


GOVERNMENT PRIVATE MEMBERS

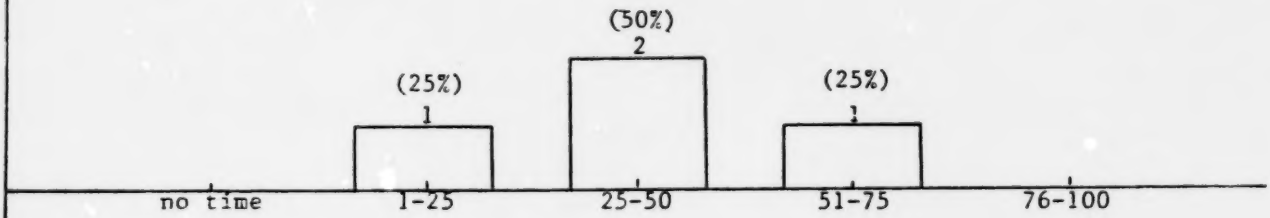


OPPOSITION MEMBERS

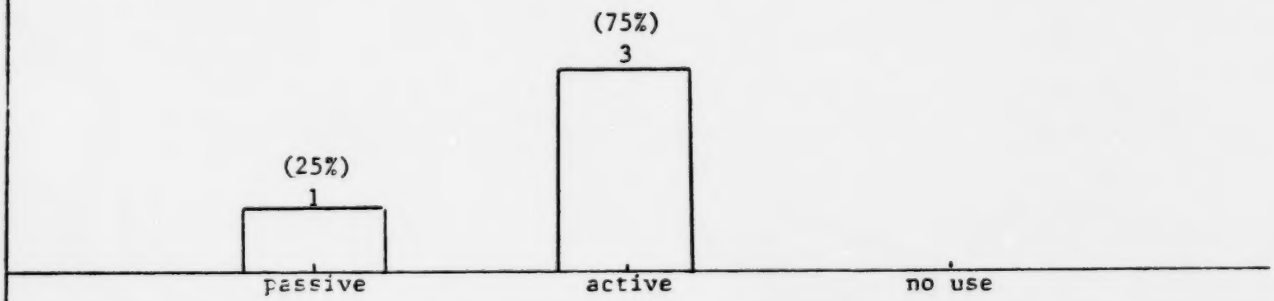
Question 1



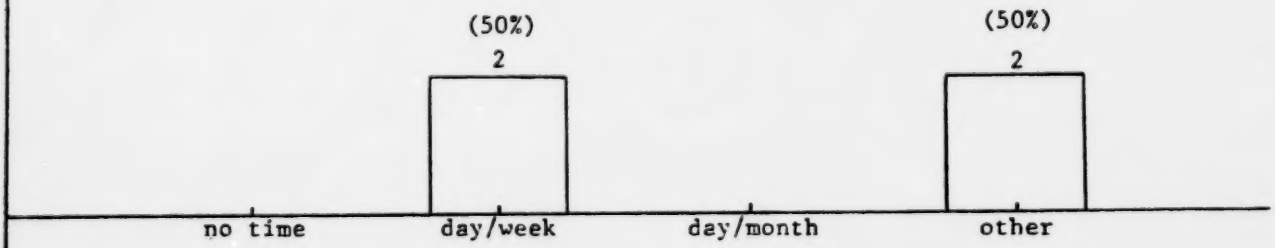
Question 2



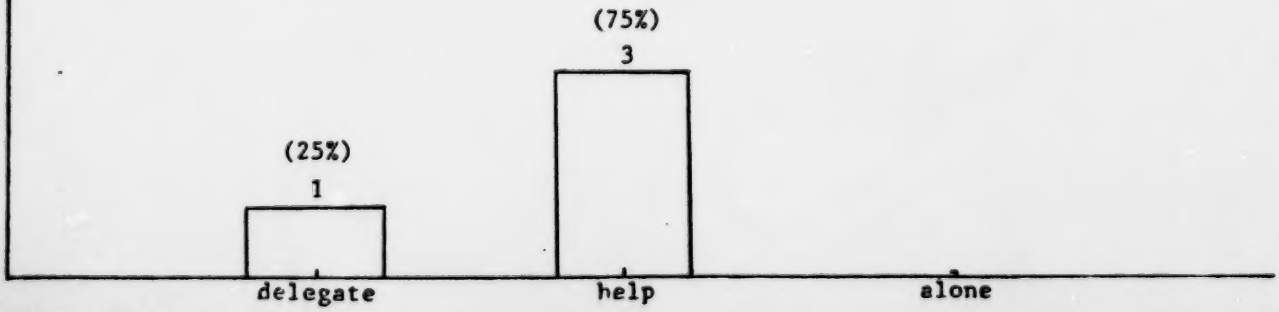
Question 3



Question 4



Question 5



All percentages for Government Cabinet Minister are calculated using a sample size of 22.

For Question 3*, the percentages total 118.2%. This is because two ministers (9.1%) did not answer the question and six others (27.3%) chose two responses.

For Question 4*, the percentages total 90.8% because two ministers failed to respond to the question.

All percentages for Government Private Members are calculated using a sample size of 40.

For Question 2*, one member (2.5%) did not answer, accounting for the percentage total of 97.5% .

For Question 3*, three members (7.5%) did not respond and five members (12.5%) chose more than one response, accounting for the percentage total of 105%.

For Question 4*, two members (5%) chose not to respond, therefore accounting for the percentage total of 95%.

For Question 5*, one member (2.5%) did not answer, giving a percentage total of 97.5%.

All percentages for Opposition Members are calculated on the basis of four completed questionnaires. There are no discrepancies in percentage totals because Members answered all questions with one response.

The results for All Members are obtained by combining the answers from all sixty six respondents. Inconsistencies are a result of the special exceptions and answers made by various members outlined above.

Percentages may not total exactly 100% due to rounding.